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ABSTRACT

This follow-up study of a special demonstration project (Oregon, 1973) evaluates the placement of children in foster care by exploring the stability and quality of placements. The project included 509 children who were under 12 years of age, unlikely to return home, and adoptable. The following questions were investigated: (1) How does the project's record of case disposition and placement stability compare with that of regular casework activity? (2) Can the level of adjustment of the children be accounted for at the time of the interview? and (3) Can each type of placement be described and compared with the others? The first part of the study investigated the stability and type of placement. The second part, through interviews with parents and children, assessed the placements' success and other concepts such as the child's self-concept. Among the results it was found that permanent placements made by both project workers and regular caseworkers were stable. Children in placements perceived as permanent by parents were more likely to be getting along better. Children who got along well when they first entered a placement were more likely to continue to do so. Children returned to their parents were doing well but did not score as high on adjustment and health as those in other placements. Findings are illustrated by case studies. (Author/RH)

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A FOLLOW-UP STUDY

OF

THE OREGON PROJECT:

A SUMMARY

by

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PREFACE

This follow-up study of children who were placed by the permanent planning 3-year demonstration project of the State of Oregon, Children's Services Division, was supported by grant #CB-OCD-481 from the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Publication of this document was made possible in part by a grant from the Administration for Public Services, "Permanency: A National Child Welfare Training Project", directed by Linda Dreyer of the Regional Research Institute. The Regional Research Institute for Human Services of the School of Social Work at Portland State University contracted to do this research.[1]

Many people deserve our gratitude. First, we thank the project staff and coauthors. As principal research assistant, Karen Green wrote the section about children who returned to their parents and provided assistance throughout the study. Arthur Emlen, Director of the Regional Research Institute, provided valuable counsel from developing the research plan through the data analyses to the writing of the final report. Vic Pike, who originated the demonstration project and became project director for the national project to disseminate permanent planning methods headquartered at the Regional Research Institute, provided valuable consultation throughout the study. Jerry Zadny contributed to the research design, assisted with the training of interviewers and gave counsel and assistance with the research from the beginning. Quentin D. Clarkson helped with design, sampling and statistical analysis.

Other contributors were Jim Casciato, responsible for the computer programming; Marie Kuehnel, the copy editor; Denise Case, research assistant during the outcome tracking; and Marilyn Sullivan, Librarian.

We appreciate especially the participation of the 160 parents who so willingly gave their time to provide insights into their experiences. Also, we are grateful to the interviewers, who journeyed the full length and breadth of the state of Oregon to talk to the subjects. We particularly thank Lani McDonald, Rosalynn Ringor, and Kathleen Leeson, graduate students in the School of Social Work at Portland State University, who worked on the project from acting as interviewers through preparation of the data for analysis and until the final words were typed.

Lois McCarthy, Manager of the Family Services Section of Children's Services Division, served as liaison between CSD and the Research Institute and cooperated in coordinating data collection arrangements with local CSD staff. She also gave valuable critical review of our questionnaires and our reports. Barbara Spencer, Manager of the Adoptions Unit, and her staff, Jane Stavenau, Helen Snyder, Mary Ann Lubich, and Diana Frost, helped us understand the adoption process and assisted in the development of data

[1]The technical report of this study is available through the Regional Research Institute for Human Services: Publication #045, A Follow-up Study of the Oregon Project by Janet Lahti et al., 1978.

collection instruments. We appreciate the help of the caseworkers and adoption workers who assisted with arrangements for interviews, and of Cecil Hinsey, researcher with CSD, who helped us with design and data collection.

Cecelia Sudia, of the Research and Evaluation Division, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, was always supportive of our efforts, providing helpful advice in all areas of this research endeavor. Others whose interest and ideas have been a help include Henry Maas, Alfred Kadushin, and Kermit Wiltse.

SUMMARY

A follow-up study of children placed during the 3-year Oregon Project, "Freeing Children for Permanent Placement", was completed by the Regional Research Institute for Human Services at Portland State University. The study compared the project's record of case dispositions with that of regular Children's Services Division cases to assess how the project children were faring and how stable the placements seemed. Following are the results of the study.

- Permanent placements made by both project workers and regular case-workers were stable. Overall, 90 percent of the permanent placements remained intact. Project returned-to-parent cases were the least stable, with 80% remaining in the same placement.

  Although there was little difference in stability between project or non-project cases, project efforts did result in the placement of more children in permanent homes (66 percent) than did routine CSD activity (46 percent).

- Children in placements perceived as permanent by parents were more likely to be getting along better. Our single most important finding was that a sense of permanence was one of the best predictors of a child's well-being. However, sense of permanence was not necessarily related to the legal permanence of the placement. Whether the child was in a legally permanent placement, adoption or returned home, or was in legally temporary foster care made very little difference in his level of adjustment and health at the time of the interview. Perception of permanence was the key.

- Children who got along well when they first entered a placement were more likely to continue to do so. The past was the best predictor of the present: a child who scored high on past adjustment and health tended to be in the high group at the time of the interview.

- Children returned to their parents were doing well but did not score as high as those in other placements.

- The overall satisfaction with the placements was high and increased over time. We found that in all groups the placements tended to improve from the time the child entered the home to the time of the interview. The adjustment was seen as an easy one by 78 percent of the parents. The rest had some difficulties. While it had not always been an easy transition, by the time of the interview most parents seemed quite satisfied.

- Children in foster care were getting along very well. No differences were found between this group and the adopted children. However, no matter how well a child is doing in foster care, there is always the real possibility that he could change homes at any time. Changing homes means disruption and adjustments must be made. The finding that children in foster care were not faring poorly does not obviate the aim of permanent planning to eliminate the possibility of the need for foster care drift.

INTRODUCTION

Finding homes for children in foster care that had good prospects for permanence was the goal of a special demonstration project started in 1973 by Oregon's Children's Services Division (CSD). This follow-up study evaluating the placements of children returned to their parents, adopted by new parents, adopted by foster parents, or remaining in foster care explored the stability and quality of placements. The project included 509 children in 17 of Oregon's 36 counties, assigned to one of 15 special caseworkers. The screening criteria for project entry were that children be under 12 years of age, unlikely to return home, and adoptable.

Although project children were selected as those not likely to return home, the first step was to thoroughly explore the possibility of reuniting them with their biological parents. If this was not possible, adoption was pursued. By the end of the third year of activity, permanent placements--returned-to-parent, adoption by new parents, adoption by foster parents, or contractual long-term foster care--had been made for 72 percent of the project children.

This study sought to answer three questions:

1) How does the project's record of case disposition and placement stability compare with that of regular Children's Services Division casework activity?

2) Can we account for the level of adjustment of the children at the time of the interview? and

3) Can each type of placement be described and compared with the others?

METHOD

A two-part study addressed these questions; the first part, or the outcome phase, determined the stability and type of placement, and in the second, interviews with parents and children dealt with questions about the placements' success.

The study sample was selected from cases in foster care in 1973. One group was comprised of project cases (n = 259). The second was a comparison group of children who met two of the project criteria: they were seen as unlikely to return home adoptable, but they were not selected for project efforts (n = 52). The third consisted of children on Oregon CSD foster care rolls who were comparable to project children in that they

were under 12 and had been in foster care 1 year by December 1973, but they were not among the children considered likely for the project and their cases were handled in a routine way (n = 181). For the interview phase, a subsample of outcome phase cases was randomly chosen.

To complete the outcome phase, the placements of all cases were tracked to February 1977. For the interview phase, staff from the Regional Research Institute conducted structured interviews with both parents and children in the parents' homes. We sought to understand the process by which families adjust to a child by exploring through interviews a broad range of behavior within the family as well as outside the home.

The most relevant concept measured was permanence. Arthur Emlen et al. (1977) define "permanence" as something that is intended to last forever, as providing commitment and continuity in the child's relationships and having a definitive legal status. But a definitive legal status may not be necessary for the intent and commitment to permanence. The foster parents who took in three siblings and kept them 4 years with no visits from the parents expressed surprise, at the time of this study, that they have no legal rights. Their intention was to provide a permanent home. Here a legally temporary home is seen as permanent. Conversely, a legally permanent home can be seen as temporary. A family whose biological child, having once experienced disruption, returns to a tenuous situation may not understand the placement as permanent.

Permanence was measured in several ways. The most straightforward way of assessing legal permanence is to determine whether or not the child is living with his biological parents or in an adoptive placement. There are also indicators of a commitment to permanence that may or may not accompany legal permanence. If the child and family are getting along well together, the placement is likely to last. Another indicator we have called "perception of permanence." This was assessed by measuring the intent of the parents and children that the placement remain intact for the forseeable future.

Other concepts measured in addition to permanence were: adjustment and health of the child when he first entered the home and at the time of the interview; child's self-concept; parental attitude towards the child's past; extent to which parents felt prepared for the child's arrival; characteristics of the child and family, such as age and time in the present home; information about the child's past and about the family's financial status.

The interview study design assumed that the perception of the parents is most important in determining the placement's success. If parents like the child and are satisfied with him no matter how someone else would feel in similar circumstances, the placement is successful and is likely to last. While the interviewers were alert for situations in which the child was not minimally provided for, we were less interested in how the homes measured up to some objective standard than in how the situation was perceived by the family.

RESULTS

In the following pages, research results will be presented as they address questions asked by this study.

Question 1: How does the project's record of case disposition and placement stability compare with that of regular Children's Services Division casework activity?

Table 1 shows that a larger percentage (66 percent) of project cases either were returned to their parents or were placed in adoption than in the comparison groups (43 percent and 46 percent respectively). The project returned 26 percent of its cases home, compared to 10 percent in Group 2 and 28 percent in Group 3. It is noteworthy that the project sent so many children home considering that one criteria for choosing project cases was that they were seen by caseworkers as not likely to return home.

TABLE 1

Outcome Phase Placements by Group
February 1, 1977

Type of Placement	Group 1 Project Children	Group 2 Considered But Not Accepted	Group 3 Under 12 and in Foster Care One Year
Permanent Placements			
Returned-to-Parent	68 (26%)	5 (10%)	51 (28%)
Adoption by New Parents	52 (20%)	6 (12%)	20 (11%)
Adoption by Foster Parents	52 (20%)	11 (21%)	13 (7%)
Total in Permanent Placements	172 (66%)	22 (43%)	84 (46%)
Foster Care*	87 (34%)	30 (57%)	97 (54%)
Total in Outcome Sample	259 (100%)	52 (100%)	181 (100%)

*Includes contractual long-term foster care, group homes, and placement with relatives

The project had a higher rate of adoption by new parents and by foster parents than did Group 3 but was not significantly different from Group 2. This similarity between the project group and Group 2 may reflect case selection procedures which resulted in the acceptance of cases into the project which were difficult to move through the permanent planning process and the rejection of less difficult cases which could be handled by the regular caseworker.

Taken together, the differences suggest that the project fulfilled its essential purpose: children who could be returned home were, and those who could not return were adopted.

Considering all permanent placements, 90 percent of the children were in stable homes. The stability of placements was assessed by noting movement from one home to another that children made during an 18-month period after the project ended (October 1975 to February 1977). Table 2 shows that there was little difference in stability between the project and the combined comparison groups. The differences were among placement categories. Adoption by new parents and project adoption by foster parents were the most stable. The project returned-to-parent placement was the least. This may reflect the additional risk taken as a permanent plan was sought for these children who had not been seen as likely to return home. For most children the additional disruption that might have been experienced during project efforts to achieve a permanent plan did not affect the stability of the placement.

Contractual long-term foster care cases could not be reliably tracked and they were pooled with foster care. To guard against any future misunderstanding, the use of written contracts seems advisable. Even though they may not be legally binding, they give credibility to the decision and put it in writing for the record.

Question 2: Can we account for the level of adjustment of the children at the time of the interview?

All measures of the child's adjustment at the time of the interview were combined to form an overall assessment of how well each child was getting along. Then an effort was made to account for this level of adjustment. To do this, measures of the child's past experiences, perception of the permanence of the home, and the child's self-concept were used in an attempt to account for differences among children in high, medium, and low adjustment groups at the time of the interview.

The assessment of the child's well-being at the time of the interview in May-June 1977 consisted of seven clusters of measures:

- Parent is satisfied with a socially accepted child.
- Child has school problems.
- Child's health is good.

TABLE 2

Placement Stability (10/75 to 2/77) and Type of Placement

	Permanent Placements						Foster Care	
	Project			Non-Project*			Project	Non-Project*
Follow-up Status	Returned -to- Parent	Adoption by New Parents	Adoption by Foster Parents	Returned -to- Parent	Adoption by New Parents	Adoption by Foster Parents		
Same Home	43 (80%)	39 (100%)	25 (93%)	45 (90%)	19 (100%)	18 (82%)	55 (40%)	96 (68%)
Changed Homes	11 (20%)	0 0	2 (7%)	5 (10%)	0 0	4 (18%)	84 (60%)	46 (32%)
Total	54 (100%)	39 (100%)	27 (100%)	50 (100%)	19 (100%)	22 (100%)	139 (100%)	142 (100%)
							Changed to Permanent Plan - 60 To Another Foster Home - 24	Changed to Permanent Plan - 20 To Another Foster Home - 26

*Groups 2 and 3 combined

- Placement is secure, with few problems.
- More authority would help.
- Nuclear family adjustment is good.
- Child is obedient.

Together these were used to divide the children into three groups: those with high, medium, and low scores on how well the placement was going in these areas.

Once these groupings had been made, we attempted to account for the differences among the three of them. Other measures were also combined and used in attempts to account for the differences.

- The Permanence set of measures grouped together questions which assessed in different ways the beliefs of the parents about the durability of the placement. This included an interviewer rating of whether or not the placement was likely to last.
- Placement Categories was the type of home a child was in: returned-to-parent, adoption by new parents, adoption by foster parents, or foster care.
- Child's Initial Status and Health contained items related to the child's adjustment and health during the first few months he was in the home.
- Client Characteristics contained demographic data about the child and his family.
- Attitude Toward the Past examined parent attitudes about the child's past, including whether the parent knew enough about it, as well as the role of past events in present family life.
- Parent Preparation represented how well the caseworker prepared the parent for the child's arrival.
- Financial Status measured the adequacy of the parents' finances.
- The Child's Perception of the Present set consisted of items designed to assess the child's thoughts about himself regarding his interaction with others, his behavior in the classroom, his ability to do tasks and in general whether or not he saw himself as helpful and happy. It was a series of pictures of children behaving in different ways and the child was asked which was most like him.
- The Barriers to Child Placement set of measures consisted of data collected in October 1975 for use in Barriers to Planning

for Children in Foster Care (Emlen, 1976). The ratings were caseworker generated. They included scores of the child's relationship to biological parents, siblings, and foster parents, as well as his service history and placeability.

A series of data analyses explored the relationship of these sets of measures to the child's level of adjustment.

In the analyses these measures accounted for substantial portions of the differences among the high, medium, and low adjustment groups (between 52 and 68 percent). Those sets contributing the most to understanding the differences were Permanence and Child's Initial Status.

Permanence

Our single most important finding was that a sense of permanence was one of the best predictors of a child's well-being. However, sense of permanence was not necessarily related to the legal permanence of the placement. Whether the child was in a legally permanent placement, adoption or returned home, or was in legally temporary foster care made very little difference in his level of adjustment and health at the time of the interview. Perception of permanence was the key. Permanence accounted for large proportions of the differences between high, medium, and low adjustment groups.

Initial Adjustment and Health

The child's adjustment and health when he first entered his present home were the best indicators of how he was getting along at the time of the interview. Initial status measures included those having to do with the time immediately following the child's move into his current home, specifically, measures of behavior in the family and outside the home, the problems the child had, the extent to which discipline was necessary and how difficult the adjustment to the child was for the family. A child who scored high on past adjustment and health tended to be in the high present status group. This finding might be explained in several ways. It is possible that the match between the family and child was a good one from the beginning. Also, it might be that some children are more robust than others, getting along well in many situations. On the other hand, this may in part measure the parent's tendency to see things consistently in a positive or negative light. Some parents, such as the Harvey parents described later in this report, seem always to view their situation in a positive way.

Other Measures

The remaining sets accounted for smaller percentages of group differences, but nevertheless some were of interest.

- Children who were younger and had parents with higher incomes scored higher.

- The data supported the widely held belief in child welfare that children do better if parents are well prepared for their arrival.

- Children in the high status group had parents who felt that they knew enough about the child's past and the past had not created problems for the family.

- From the Child's Perception of the Present set of measures, we learned that children who were in the high present status group tended to have a positive self-concept.

- Children who were doing better tended to have biological mothers who, at the time efforts were being made to achieve a permanent plan, presented greater barriers to the child's return home. Thus it appeared that the more clear-cut the decision to seek adoption, the more likely the child was to obtain a high score.

Neither the rating of the placeability of the child, the number of foster care placements, nor the length of time he had spent in foster care--measures which might be expected to relevant--accounted for a significant portion of the difference.

Well-being Within Placement

Each placement category was studied separately in an attempt to account for differences among the high, medium, and low present status groups. The findings were generally the same as for the total group. The children who got along well when they first entered the home and who were perceived as permanent family members were more likely to be in the high group. The adjustment of the child when he first entered the home was particularly important to the later well-being of those adopted by foster parents. Perception of permanence was not as important for the well-being of children in foster care as for those in other placements. Even so, it was predictive of high status in this group.

For those adopted by new parents and those in foster care, children of parents who felt well prepared by the caseworker tended to be in the high group. For children in foster care age was important, with younger children getting along better.

Question 3: Can each type of placement be described and compared with the others?

Children in each type of placement were compared on the measures of how they were getting along at the time of the interview to see if there were differences among the four placement categories--returned-to-parent, adoption by new parents, adoption by foster parents and foster care. Children who returned to their parents did not score as high on measures of adjustment at the time of the interview as children in the other placements. Their scores were significantly lower. There were no differences among the other placements.

It comes as no surprise that children returned to their parents did not score as high as others in the sample. Adoptive parents and foster parents are chosen because they are believed to be able to provide good child care. This is particularly true of parents who adopt a child new to them. These parents are carefully assessed before adoption. After the child is placed with them the adoption worker provides services to help assure a satisfactory adjustment. However, children returned to their biological parents go back to parents who have already demonstrated that they have problems providing for the needs of the child. In most cases some problems remain after the child returns. The fact that a parent has made sufficient adjustments to make the return of his or her child possible does not mean that the home can measure up to a carefully selected home.

These children should have been and were returned home because there was no valid legal or social reason for keeping them in foster care. Foster care is designed to be temporary until parents can take the children back. From a social policy perspective, biological parents should have custody if adequate care can be provided. Legally, biological parents have a right to custody unless their extreme inadequacy can be demonstrated to the court. Things might go more smoothly for these families, however, if the agency provided special services. A commitment of time and effort such as that made to adoptive parents could facilitate a successful adjustment.

Returning Home

The right of children to receive the care of their biological parents and of parents to have custody and control over children born to them is considered basic to the organization of our society (CWLA, 1973, p.8). The Oregon Project sought to return children to their biological parents whenever feasible and 26 percent of the children in its caseload were reunited with their parents by February 1, 1977.

Caseworkers classified the biological parents into four groups according to their behavior: abandonment, desertion, conduct, and condition (see Emlen et al., 1977, pp. 20-24). Seventy-seven percent of the mothers of the children in the interview sample who eventually returned home had been classified as exhibiting conduct that did not permit return of their children. Their own existence was so chaotic that they could only marginally care for themselves; either they were inconsistent in their plans and efforts to obtain custody of their children or they were unable or unwilling to cooperate in a treatment plan. The other parents suffered from a mental, psychological, or intellectual condition which seemed unlikely to change and prevented reunification of the family or they had deserted or abandoned their child. There were more conduct cases among the returned-to-parent group than among those who lost their children to adoption. It seems that parents in this category were more likely to make the changes necessary to permit the child to be returned.

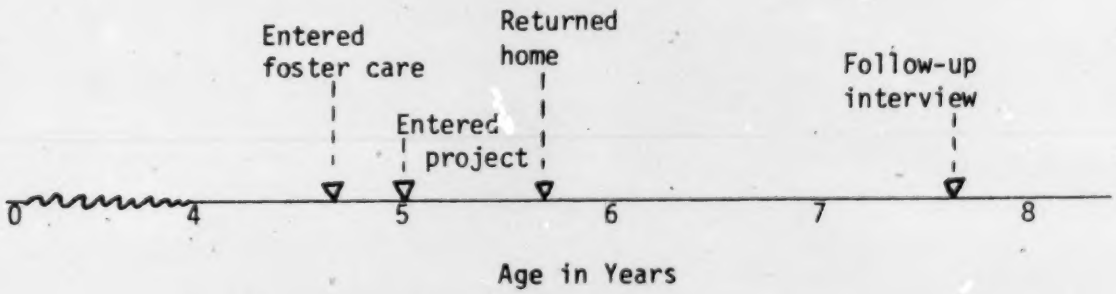
Children who returned home were on the average 5 years old, they had been

in foster care a year and a half and most had lived in more than one foster home. Most children had returned home within a year after they entered the project. Fifty-three percent of the children returned to homes with both a mother and father present.

The reunification of a family is a personal process. To portray it we present a case study. This child was among the low group on present adjustment and health. (All cases presented in this study are actual cases. Names and places have been changed.)

Mike Miller

Judy Miller had allowed her family to take on the responsibility of caring for her son, Mike, off and on during the first years of his life. Mike entered Children's Services Division's care at about 4 years of age. After a year in foster care he was returned home through efforts by the permanent planning project. His mother had complied with the criteria agreed upon to obtain the return of her son: she had settled down and found a job; changed the people with whom she was associating; attended parenting classes, although she found them completely useless; maintained a home and visited Mike regularly twice a month even though it was difficult since she had moved out of state. A time line for Mike follows.



Judy was glad to have her son back and she was adamant about keeping him. She wasn't going to let him go again "no matter what happened." He was her responsibility, she said, even though there were other people who might want children more than she did. When Mike first returned, she believed that Oregon's Children's Services Division could take him back at any time. Bud Nelson, Judy's present husband, was defiant and assured her that they had enough money to fight CSD if they ever tried to take the child again. Later she checked and found that CSD could not take Mike away easily.

Mike was 5½ years old when he returned. The move was traumatic for him, since he had become attached to his foster family. As Judy herself pointed out, "They were more of a family than we are." Mike's foster family went to church regularly, and after his return home he would ask Judy why they didn't go. Also, his foster mother was pregnant at the time he left and Mike was torn between being part of that family's excitement and going home. Judy was also pregnant then, so Mike was able to transfer some of his anticipation over to this event, but his sense of loss was great when Judy lost the baby. The subject of foster care continued to be painful and Judy preferred not to mention it in front of Mike.

Mike was unsure of the limits of his "new" home and after an initial honeymoon period Judy felt his behavior fluctuated from one extreme to the other, testing them. His occasional threats to return to Oregon were irritating at first but she learned to ignore them and he gradually ceased to mention it. He had problems with bedwetting and continues to have them, even though medical tests have found no physiological cause.

Mike and Bud had not known each other before Mike's return, and the process of adjustment was not an easy one. At first stepfather and son ignored each other. Bud didn't like children, something Judy hadn't realized until they had a difficult five-year-old on their hands. He felt that Mike "couldn't do anything," a feeling that was heightened when Judy had Mike removed from first grade that fall and returned to kindergarten. Then Bud was certain that Mike would never grow up or learn anything.

Judy recalled that period as the most difficult time. She fought with Bud and with Mike. Mike's grades were very poor and his behavior at school was "rotten." He pushed his teacher to the limit, trying to get away with anything.

After being home for 2 years, Mike's overall adjustment at the time of the interview was generally below average for the interview sample. However, Judy felt things were improving. Mike's school work had gone from poor to good. Although his social behavior at school was still "rotten," he was adjusting. His behavior in the family had improved and his behavior outside the home continued to be good. Judy felt Mike could handle himself better and was less of a follower. Toward the end of Mike's second year with them, Judy noticed that Bud was beginning to feel that Mike was capable in some ways and their relationship was improving.

At the time of the interview Judy showed a strong sense of responsibility toward Mike. She was concerned about the quality of his schooling and happy that he was attending a school that had a number of federal programs in case he ever needed to make use of them. They were living in an older inner-city home. She worried

about his behavior in the neighborhood, since he had mostly older boys to play with and she was keeping close tabs on him, calling the police if he was gone too long.

However, Judy Miller Nelson was realistic about her family situation and about herself as a mother. She found it hard to be a parent. Looking back on it later, Judy felt that if she had known how difficult it would be she would not have put them all through it. She thought high school students, both male and female, should be given some introduction to dealing with children. She also thought she should not have involved her family in problems with Mike. They took over her responsibility and she didn't have to deal with the issues. In retrospect, she felt she should have gone directly to an agency which would have worked with her to find solutions. She felt that foster care and emergency shelter care didn't do enough of this. She called emergency shelter care when Mike's disobedience caused more anger than she could handle. They removed him for 3 days and the family weathered the momentary crisis, but the reason for it was not resolved. She believed more should be done with parent and child together rather than merely separating them. Clearly, this family has had difficulties adjusting to Mike's presence. However, the family has a strong commitment to keeping him.

A third of the parents in this placement category did not find the adjustment easy to make either and 40 percent indicated some difficulty finding activities they could do with the child at first. For many (72 percent) it was a period of uncertainty. They said they never knew what to expect. Although most children made friends easily, 80 percent had one or more problems such as bedwetting, nightmares, lying, destructiveness, and stealing. Half of the parents felt the child had been withdrawn and shy at first. Forty-eight percent of the parents said they had felt some uncertainty during the initial period about the length of time the child would remain in the home. Fifty-two percent felt the child would stay no matter what happened. So the process of reintegrating the child into the family was difficult and trying for a number of these parents.

Between the time the child returned home and the time of the interview, improvements were made in family adjustment, the child's behavior, health, and school performance. The number of children having problems (such as bedwetting, lying, nightmares, etc.) decreased, with 60 percent having one or more problems at the time of the interview. Parents were asked to make several adjustment ratings for two different points in time: one when the child first moved into the home and the second at the time of the interview. Past ratings depended upon accurate recall of events that had taken place 8 or more months before and their precision can be questioned. It was clear, however, that most parents saw the present as representing an improvement over the past.

Though parents in this group were not unanimously positive on many issues, they all agreed that it had been a good idea to bring the child into the

home. Ninety-seven percent felt that the child and the family had adjusted well, and all parents thought that the child felt proud to be a family member. Parental satisfaction with the child is shown by the following responses: 97 percent felt the child gets along well with other children; 83 percent disagreed with the statement "He/she is behind in his/her school work." Regarding discipline problems, 77 percent said the child obeys family rules, and 78 percent disagreed that more authority would make things better.

The great majority of parents (83 percent) currently believed that the child would stay in the home no matter what happened. An additional 7 percent of the parents saw their situation as permanent unless serious problems developed. This was a considerable improvement over the initial uncertainty expressed in the figures for their understanding when the child first returned.

The following responses support this apparent increase in security and sense of permanence: 96 percent of the parents agreed with the statement that the child would stay in the home until he reached age 18; 86 percent of the parents said they had plans for college or career training for their child; and all (100 percent) said the child was interested in making plans for future family activities. Only 24 percent felt they were too busy with the present needs of the family to think about the future. However, a number of the parents (36 percent) still believed that their children were concerned about having to move again.

Seventy percent of the interview sample parents were willing to have their child interviewed. Over half of these children were not familiar with the term "foster child." In response to a question asking them to compare their present home with their former home, all but one felt their present home was better, most for psychological reasons.

As illustrated by the case study and the discussion of the interview responses as a whole, many of these families have had a difficult time adjusting and some children still are not functioning as their parents would hope. However, our interviewers found no cases which they thought warranted intervention and the return of the child to foster care. All parents felt it had been a good idea to bring the child home and almost all thought the child and family had adjusted well. Parents exhibited a high degree of satisfaction with the child and a clear majority felt their child was home to stay.

Adoption by New Parents

When a project child moved into an adoptive home, he did so only after every effort to return him home to his parents had failed and after the adoptive home had been selected and prepared especially for him. Reasoning that the potentially adoptive child, particularly the older project child, had experienced too many disruptions, those responsible for adoptive placement sought to make certain that this placement would be permanent and permit the child to develop normally.

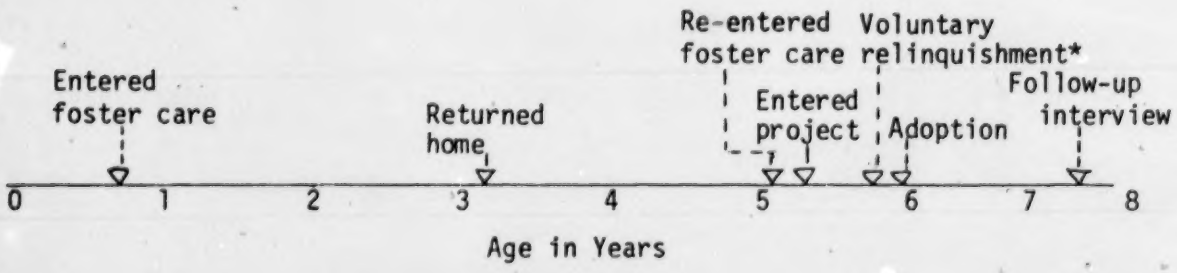
By the time these children entered their new adoptive homes, they had had a number of unsettling experiences. Most of their biological parents had major problems which prevented the reunification of the family according to ratings made by Childrens' Services Division caseworkers. All children had left their biological parents and lived an average of 33 months in foster care. Fifty-six percent had lived in more than one foster home.

Another kind of disruption came for many after they were chosen to be in the permanent planning project. Parental visits sometimes were scheduled in an effort to reunite the family. Visits with parents were disturbing for 73 percent of the children who were visited, causing such behaviors as temper tantrums, bedwetting, lying, or sleeplessness. Then followed the period during which voluntary relinquishment or termination of parental rights was sought. In some cases, this was a stormy and uncertain time. Attempts at reunification of the biological family, followed by efforts to free the child took an average of 13 months. Involuntary termination took longer and often involved more upsetting experiences for the child.

What problems and satisfactions occur for the child and his new parents and what this process of adjustment involves is as individual and specific as each child and each family. But, for a glimpse of this process in concrete terms, we document the experiences of a family who seemed to have few problems. This placement fell in the high adjustment group at the time of the interview.

Sandra Harvey

Seven-year-old Sandra Harvey experienced a series of moves from the time she was placed in foster care at 10 months of age. After 28 months she went home for 2 years but returned to foster care and had three additional placements before her adoption in August 1975. According to her caseworker, Sandra had no physical, psychological or other problems which would impede her adoptive placement. Following is a time line for Sandra.



Sandra is the youngest of three children of a biological father who had deserted them and a mother who could not adjust her life to permit the children's return to her. While Sandra lived with

*of parental rights

her parents, her father physically abused her. Sandra described her life with her parents by saying, "I'd be hit for saying things." Sandra's mother visited her sporadically while she was in foster care, but these encounters disturbed the child, who seemed to feel few bonds to her mother. Both parents voluntarily relinquished their parental rights to the three children.

Sandra came to the Harvey home rather precipitously. The family had been notified that a child had been found for them, living in a foster home 300 miles away. In view of this distance, and with the belief that Sandra had been well prepared for the move, her caseworker and the adoption worker decided to forego the usual number of preplacement visits and place the child immediately.

As the Harveys began the journey with Sandra to her new home and the distance between her and her cherished foster home increased, the child's sorrow deepened. The new parents perceived this and told Sandra that if she felt like crying it was all right. Crying seemed to help, and the parents were especially glad that they had encouraged Sandra since they later found out that she had not been permitted to cry in her biological parents' home.

The child fit into the family with few problems, according to the parents. Their other child, a boy, gave her some of his books and toys so "she would have something." When a friend gave a shower for Sandra and her mother, her new brother wrapped up some of his things so Sandra would get more. The parents were excited to have her and felt that now the family was complete. They found the new child an enjoyable addition. Mrs. Harvey characterized their initial experience as ". . . just total excitement." But they had determined that ". . . she was just going to be another person in the house." They believed that the best inducement to Sandra's adjustment was to behave as though it was an accomplished fact.

While these parents saw the adjustment as an easy one, some changes had occurred during the 20 months Sandra had been in the home. At first, she seemed unsure that it was really her permanent home. She was anxious to please the new family, and, in an effort to assure her continued presence, she would tell people what she believed they wished to hear, even if it was not true. Also, she displayed her fear of losing the new-found home when the caseworker was due to visit. For Sandra, caseworkers were people who came when it was time to move to a new home, and she was visibly anxious until the visit was over. Though the parents had always found the caseworker to be helpful, they could understand their child's concern. They believed that this behavior would decrease when Sandra felt more secure in the new home, and it did. Mrs. Harvey avowed,". . .now she knows that they are not going to come pick her up and move her . . . We [even]tease her about it."

The Harveys tried to help Sandra feel the permanence of the new home in specific ways. Soon after she came she began to use her new name and the parents helped her open a savings account in that name. These two events, the parents believed, helped to solidify feelings of permanence within the child.

Sandra's caseworker told the Harveys that the child was shy and uncomfortable around large groups of people, especially strangers, and recommended that the family avoid this social contact at first. Their large extended family and many friends made it difficult to isolate the child in this way. Within the first 2 months of Sandra's life in her new home a large family wedding was planned. The mother decided that Sandra could go and made special mother-and-daughter matching dresses for the occasion. "She would be like Mom. If I got away from her she would know what to look for," Mrs. Harvey said. The child enjoyed the event and was not uncomfortable.

"Now she is just a normal kid," Mrs. Harvey said. "She likes school, the family and friends, and once she was sure that this was her home she became relaxed." This family fared well with its new member. Since the beginning they had been satisfied with her and with their ways of dealing with this child's development. Both Sandra and her mother realized that Sandra was behind in her motor coordination. Family members were trying to help her by playing ball with her and providing her with jump ropes and games. The Harveys attended to Sandra's scholastic problems by working on her motor skills in play activity and maintaining close contact with the school principal to discuss the child's special needs.

These parents appeared optimistic and undismayed by any problems encountered in this adoption and were deeply committed to the permanence of the arrangement.

The experiences of the Harvey family are similar in some ways to those of other adoptive parents. The adjustment was an easy one for them as it was for 64 percent of the others. Also, improvements took place for them and for most other families. The new adoptive homes in our study shared many attributes. An interviewer characterized her adoptive families in the study with the following observation:

> "Parents who adopted children new to them were very receptive and cooperative. The homes were well established. The home environment was family-oriented with lots of family pictures and children's art around. Families told of going camping and engaging in other family activities."

The adoptive families in our study consisted of both a mother and father in all cases and had an average of two children in addition to the study subject. The adopted child had lived with his new parents an average of 27 months at the time of the interview.

A feeling of permanence characterized this group. At the time of the interview, 100 percent of these parents said that the child would remain permanently with them no matter what happened. Interviewers were also asked to make a rating of the likelihood of the placement lasting. Of 97 percent of the placements the interviewer said, "The child will remain in this home no matter what happens." The interviewer said that everything seemed to going well in 82 percent of the placements, with some problems existing for 18 percent. Thus, despite problems, most families saw these adoptive arrangements as permanent and the interviewers agreed with their self-assessment.

Another shared characteristic was that improvement took place in all adjustments. The child's behavior inside the home and outside, the family's adjustment to the child, and his behavior at school--all had improved since the child first entered the home.

Adoptive parents were nearly unanimous in their answers to interview questions indicating positive family adjustment. At the time of the interview, all parents who adopted a child new to them said that bringing the child to live with them was a good idea. Although 45 percent said that they often had to discipline the child, this appeared not to be a serious problem since all parents seemed generally satisfied, saying that the child and family had adjusted well to each other.

Events occurring in the past caused problems for 63 percent of the parents and 43 percent wished they knew more about the child's experiences then. However, only 28 percent of the children expressed to parents an interest in knowing about people in their past.

In these adoptions, a small corps of adults in the form of agency personnel and adoptive parents have expended great energies toward providing security and fulfillment for a child whose life seemed bereft of possibilities. An important evaluation of the adoptive situation can come from the children themselves. To this end, the child was interviewed separately to delineate his own self-concept, understanding of the permanence of his present situation, and perception of foster childhood. Children were asked to compare their present homes with the last home in which they lived. Most children said their present home was an improvement over the past, 10 listing psychological reasons and 5 mentioning material advantages. The children in this group seemed to perceive themselves as belonging in their current home at the time of the interview and in the future and saw it as having advantages over past homes.

Ten of the 23 children answering questions about foster care said they did not know what a foster child was. Most of those who answered believed that foster children were treated as well or better than other children but approximately 22 percent saw foster children as not being treated as well.

The picture of adoption by new parents is undoubtedly a positive one. The parents seem materially and psychologically stable, with a deep com-

mitment to the success of the adoption and the adjustment of the children. They all voiced improvement and satisfaction with the results at interview time. The children seemed to feel permanent in their new positions and valued the situation as an improvement over the past. If the goal of this project, as part of the general goal of social service, was to improve the quality of life for people, then adoption by new parents seems to have been highly successful.

Adoption by Foster Parents

Ordinarily when foster parents are chosen, it is with the understanding that their role is to provide temporary care, and they must be willing to give up the child when he can return to his parents or is adopted. Sometimes foster parents develop strong bonds to a child while his biological parents lose contact with him. The agency and foster parents may then decide that the foster home could be a desirable permanent placement for the child and foster parents adopt.

While adoption by foster parents is a relatively new phenomenon in the child welfare field, it was an important permanent placement for the Oregon Project. Of the 40 percent of the project children who were adopted, half were adopted by foster parents.

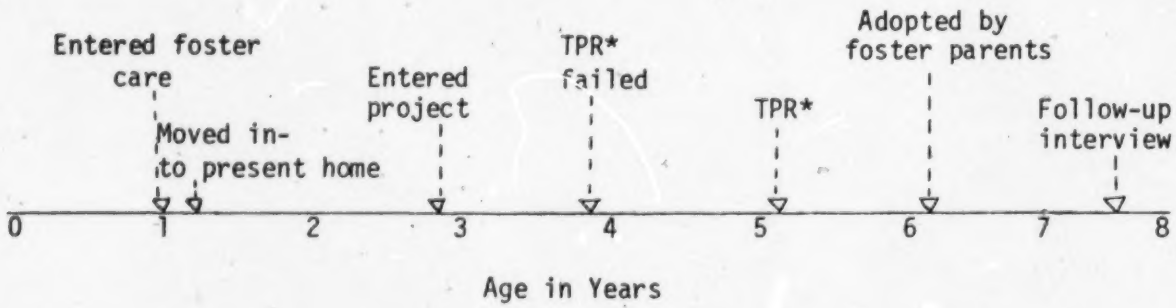
Loss of contact with the biological parents was the most predominant reason for moving toward adoption in this placement category. Forty-one percent of the mothers and 69 percent of the fathers abandoned or deserted their child, and another 9 percent of the fathers and 38 percent of the mothers could not adjust their life to make the child's return possible.

The time prior to being adopted is often a period of uncertainty and conflict for the foster child, and when foster parents adopt they experience this along with the child. Parental visits can be particularly disruptive. Twenty-three percent of the biological fathers and 38 percent of the biological mothers in our interview sample of foster parent adoptions visited their children during the period when project caseworkers were developing a permanent plan. At least 46 percent of the children had visits from one or both parents. The visits were disturbing for a majority of the children and behavior problems such as lying, bedwetting, and temper tantrums were noted afterwards for 68 percent of those who had visits. Thirty-two percent of the children did not seem to care about the visits one way or the other. Caseworkers stated that in no case did the child enjoy the visits. Many of the foster parents were obliged to send a child to visits knowing that such visits had been disruptive in the past. They had to deal with the disturbance evident in the child and face the fact that each parental visit could dim their hopes of adopting.

The case study presented here illustrates some of the operative forces in the process of foster parent adoption, detailing a particularly stressful pre-adoptive period. The Vance case was rated in the high group at the time of the interview.

Carolina Vance

When Carolina was an infant, her biological mother physically abused her, causing hospitalization for several weeks. During that time, both a nurse and a dietitian at the hospital volunteered to take Carolina home. Her first foster care placement was with the nurse, but when that family moved out of state, the caseworker remembered the dietitian and placed Carolina in the Vance home. The Vances had two boys, ages 2½ and 4, and were anxious to adopt a daughter. The caseworker felt certain that parental rights would be terminated quickly. Thus the Vances understood that Carolina would soon be available for adoption. However, it was not until she was 6 years old, after many disappointments for her parents and caseworker, that the home became permanently hers. A time line for Carolina Vance is shown below.



The intervening years were difficult for the Vance family. The foster mother thought at times that she might not be strong enough to stand the uncertainty and the conflict caused by the biological mother's visits and Carolina's aberrant behavior. "My friends wouldn't have stood it, I was tired emotionally and physically," Mrs. Vance said. She was pregnant during the time termination was being sought and this added to her physical exhaustion. But when she was ready to give up, her husband would not, and so by supporting each other during the most demanding times they could wait for a decision.

Carolina's biological mother had been in a mental hospital but had improved enough for release. She visited Carolina regularly and these visits resulted in severe behavior problems for the child. The father did not visit. Carolina seemed to try to take responsibility for her mother's problems and worried about them. The visits permitted her to escape any discipline in the foster home and she liked the special treats her mother gave her. She would blame the foster mother for taking her away from her biological mother. She became defensive and would lie and steal at the time of the visits. The visits were followed by nightmares and during the time termination was sought the child would come to her foster parents' room in the

*Termination of parental rights

middle of every night and stand over the bed till they awakened and reassured her. The child also feared the caseworker and would hide whenever she came. The process of obtaining a permanent home caused much stress for this child, who was barely 5 when parental rights were finally terminated.

Looking back, it may seem appalling that this period of uncertainty continued for 4 years, but those involved were always thinking "any day now." The worker who handled the case for 2 years before it came into the permanent planning project was certain that the severely physically harmed child would never be permitted to return to her abusing mother. But contact between the parent and child was not discontinued. The mother showed continued, if very slow, improvement and even though she was never well enough to have the child with her a case could not be made for termination of parental rights.

When the case became part of the permanent planning project, it appeared that the biological mother would never be able to care for Carolina, in spite of her slight improvement. After a year of attempts to see if she could provide care, a termination of parental rights petition was filed and a hearing held. News that the petition was denied was devastating for the Vance family and the project caseworker. However, 1 month later the biological mother had another mental breakdown and within 4 months she voluntarily relinquished her parental rights. Finally the Vances could adopt Carolina. Nightmares stopped immediately after visits were discontinued and the child slept every night.

At the adoption hearing, the judge spoke directly to Carolina and explained that her biological mother could not take care of her and that from then on the Vances were her parents. She was no longer torn between her loyalty to her mother and to her foster family. Within a few months she became what her parents described as a normal child.

When interviewed, Carolina's parents expressed satisfaction with her and stated that her school work was excellent. The family had always felt that Carolina was a bright, sensitive, creative child and, at the time of the interview they saw her as fulfilling her potential. Her parents considered her an active, strong-willed child. They believed this made it harder for her to get along with her brothers and wished that this would improve.

While these parents were committed to adoption from the beginning, the reminder that the arrangement might not be permanent was always with them in the form of parental visits. The difficult time for this family was the time of uncertainty about whether or not Carolina would be returned to her biological mother. Having survived this long period, striking improvements took place and when interviewed the family, according to the interviewer rating, was getting along very well and would provide a permanent home for Carolina.

The family in the adoption by foster parents category consisted of both a mother and father in 94 percent of the cases and had an average of two children in addition to the study subject. This child had lived in the home an average of 5½ years with a range of from 2 to 12 years.

While some improvement took place later, the child adopted by foster parents got along well when he first came to the home. The family's adjustment to the foster child who was adopted did not change a great deal over time, with high ratings consistently recorded. Many of the families seem to have been like the Vances and were satisfied with the child from the beginning. Health as well as behavior in the home and outside showed a continual improvement.

Most of the parents saw the placement as permanent at the time of the interview, and they had made some future plans involving the child. Twenty-eight out of 32 families were seen by interviewers as getting along well and four had problems, though none was rated as major.

Parents in this group did not seem curious about the child's past. Most said that the child was not interested in knowing about significant people from his past and did not often ask about it. Most parents felt that their information was sufficient. The length of time the children had been in the home could contribute to this feeling, for those who had lived in a home longer might dwell less on the more distant past. Frequently these parents as foster parents had direct contact with the child's biological parents, so they may have all the information they need.

Most of the parents permitted the child to be interviewed. A majority of the children knew what a foster child was and believed that foster children were treated like other children. In response to the question comparing the present and former homes, 9 out of 10 who answered preferred their present homes, with 7 giving reasons that pointed to a healthier psychological situation.

Adoption by foster parents is a new and almost unstudied permanent plan for children in foster care. According to our measures at the time of the interview, the parents were committed to permanence and satisfied with their child's absorption into the family. The children, as a whole, scored above the mean on behavior, health, and on the measures of the child's self-image. On all of our scales, foster parent adoption has done as well as any other placement, including new parent adoption. Thus, we see foster parent adoption as a viable permanent placement option.

Foster Care

Approximately 75 percent of all children in foster care find such placement temporary, as it was meant to be (Emlen, 1976). The remaining 25 percent who stay in foster care for indefinite periods were the target population of our research. Most of the children in the foster care follow-up sample had been in Oregon CSD foster care for at least 4 years by February 1977. The foster care cases discussed here are from the project and Group 3.

The two groups will be examined separately.

Children in the project foster care group represent the disappointments of project staff in that their efforts to achieve a permanent plan were not successful. The Group 3 foster care sample is of interest because it represents the fate the project sought to avoid--foster care drift. These children were eligible by two project criteria--they were under 12 and had been in foster care 1 year or more at the time the project began but were not taken into the project. They remained in foster care.

Project Foster Care. The characteristics of project children who remained in foster care were examined in an attempt to define the reasons a permanent placement was not found for them. The role of the biological parents in the lives of these children was the first consideration. Caseworker ratings of the behavior of the parents indicated the following: Twenty-nine percent of the mothers and 57 percent of the fathers had either abandoned or deserted their child; 43 percent of the mothers and 24 percent of the fathers could not alter their conduct to permit the return of the child; and for the others their mental condition precluded the return of the child. It appeared that the parent's behavior category was not of much importance in determining the final outcome because this classification for project cases remaining in foster care was almost the same as for project children who were adopted.

Children in foster care at the end of the project had not exhibited strong ties to their biological parents and had seemed to feel greater bonds to their foster parents. In fact, 24 percent were legally free for adoption. Another 24 percent were legally free from one biological parent.

The child's relationships with his biological parents did not differ from those of project children who obtained a permanent placement. The exception was returned-to-parent children, who had stronger ties and more contact with their biological parents and whose mothers presented fewer barriers to their return.

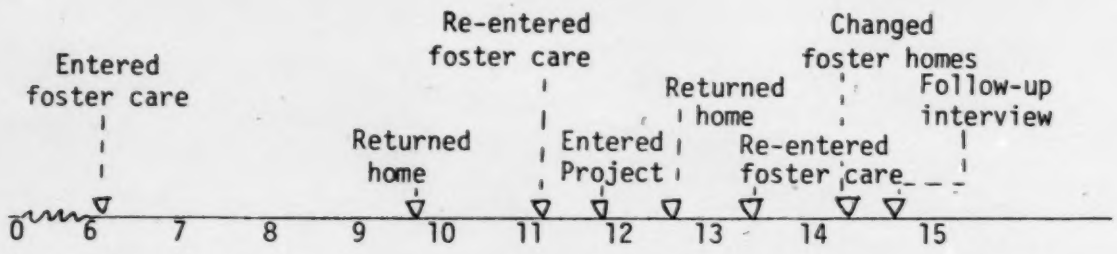
Differences between project children who achieved a permanent plan and those remaining in foster care were related to the characteristics of the child and to permanence. Project children remaining in foster care were older, less placeable and were seen as less permanently placed than those adopted or returned to their parents.

The case study presented here is typical of the project foster care sample in that it illustrates an extensive yet disappointing effort to achieve a permanent plan.

Bruce Sampson

Bruce is the oldest of six children of a father who deserted the family and a mother whose conduct caused agency personnel to seriously question her ability to care for the children. The children first entered foster care in 1968 when Bruce was 6 years old and

they remained 3½ years before returning to their mother in 1972. Fourteen months later, Mrs. Sampson, the mother, abandoned the children and moved to another state. Shortly thereafter, the case became part of the permanent planning project. A time line for Bruce follows.



The initial assessment by project staff was that while they had strong doubts about Mrs. Sampson's ability to be an adequate mother, project policy would be followed and an attempt made to reunite the family. Soon the mother returned to Oregon and indicated a desire to get her children back. Bruce had been forced by his mother's boyfriend into an incestuous relationship with his mother. For this among other reasons, the mother was required to receive counseling at the local mental health association. In an effort to get her children back, she improved her housekeeping, got a job and adequate housing, and visited the children. Bruce resisted communication with his mother and displayed no emotion during or after the visits. His foster parents wanted to adopt Bruce, but as the mother was making some effort to regain custody this was not possible. According to Vic Pike, director of the demonstration project, this was a "frustrating, on-the-fence case."

Finally after a review hearing by the court, the decision was made to send the children home again, two at a time, ending with Bruce and his brother. Bruce was responding better to his mother and it appeared that he would return home willingly. In May 1975 he did return.

For this mother managing a home with six children by herself was too much, and problems came up constantly. Bruce was able to remain with her for a year before returning to foster care. He did not get along well in this foster home and after living there about a year returned to a short-term shelter care home while a search was made for another foster home. No home was found and when the caseworker asked the parents of the shelter care home if they would take Bruce as a foster child they consented, knowing that if they didn't the only place left for him was a group home. When he became their foster child, Bruce was moved to a larger bedroom and

the parents took him out to dinner to celebrate. They also helped him open a bank account.

Because these parents have provided more than 100 children with shelter care, when interviewed it was hard for them to remember how Bruce behaved when he first came 3 months before the interview. They did remember that he had a "smart mouth" and the father had to discipline him. His caseworker had told them that Bruce didn't like women, so the foster mother "was careful." These foster parents described Bruce at interview time as getting along fairly well with other children, though he was a bit of a loner, doing acceptable school work, adjusting to the family, and having good health.

They believed the placement would be permanent unless problems arose, and the interviewer agreed. They thought bringing Bruce to live with them was a good idea. Bruce still had occasional contact with his mother, who promised to visit but often failed to appear. Bruce saw his mother as the person he would want to tell if something wonderful happened, so it appeared that bonds existed.

According to Bruce, his classmates treated a foster child the same as other children, but in school he was eligible for a free lunch and "People notice that." He believed foster children did not have a lot of friends. In assessing his present foster home, Bruce said, "More freedom, seems more like a family."

In summary, Bruce entered foster care at age 6 and at the time of the interview he was 14½ years old. During this time he had experienced numerous moves and the permanency of his present home was by no means certain.*

The interview process uncovered some general trends in the project foster care group. These children had lived in their current home an average of 37 months, but their stays ranged from 1 month to 12 years, 10 months. The average length of stay in foster care was 47 months and most had experienced two or three foster placements.

Even though foster care is designed to be a temporary arrangement, some parents and children perceived it as permanent. Seventy-two percent of the foster parents said that the child would stay in their home no matter what happened. Interviewers did not see as many placements as permanent as foster parents did. They felt 45 percent of the placements would remain intact no matter what happened, with the remainder moving if problems occurred. All parents agreed that bringing the child to live with them was a good idea. Answers to questions on the child's interview designed as indicators

*As this was going to press Bruce's foster parents reported that he was no longer with them and his whereabouts were unknown to them.

of permanence revealed that the children were almost unanimous in seeing their present homes as lasting.

These children, like all those in the interview sample, improved in all areas investigated in this study. Even so, looking at school work, 50 percent of the children in this group were not seen by their foster parents as performing up to their ability. All foster parents believed that the family adjustment was good; 95 percent of the children got along well with other children in the family, and they all got along well with friends and relatives. However, 43 percent of the parents said that they often had to discipline the child. In about half of these foster care families there was a desire for more knowledge about the child's past.

Of the children in this category who answered the questions about foster care, a third said they did not know what a foster child was. Two-thirds of the respondents said that foster children were treated the same as other children. All children answering the question said that their present home was better than the last one. Most indicated psychological reasons, such as having more friends, parents caring more about the child, and the child having more freedom.

Group 3 Foster Care. Children in this group were in foster care in project counties in 1973 at the time of the screening to obtain project cases but did not enter the project. They stayed in foster care. Data about biological parents, placeability, and bonds are not available for these children since all were not part of the group for whom these data were collected. Some information is available, however, about the present foster homes of these children. The homes had both parents in 92 percent of the cases and the average number of children living there was three. By February 1, 1977, 62 percent of this group had lived in their present home more than 3 years. The range was from 1 month to 13 years.

A sense of permanence and commitment was found among many of these foster parents. Fifty-six percent said the child would stay in the home no matter what happened and almost all said that bringing the child to live with them was a good idea. The interviewers believed that 62 percent of the placements would remain intact no matter what happened. So even though this placement is seen by society as short-term, many foster parents believed it to be permanent.

A comparison was made of children who had lived in their current home more than 36 months with those living there less than that amount of time on all Permanence measures. No differences between the groups were found. It appeared that those parents who saw the placement as permanent were not necessarily those who had the child in their home the longest time.

While 38 percent of the parents said that they frequently had to discipline the child, 96 percent avowed that the child took pride in being a member of the family and obeyed the family rules. According to most parents, improvements had taken place since the child came.

The child's past did not seem to be of great concern to these foster parents. Only a quarter of them said that the child was interested in knowing about his past and even fewer foster parents wanted to know more about that time or talked with the child about his past.

Fifty-six percent of the parents did not feel that they were well prepared by the caseworker for the child's arrival.

Most children in this group knew what a foster child was and 93 percent of those who answered questions about how foster children were treated said that they were treated as well as or better than other children. Seventy-one percent of the children said that their present home was better than the past one and they divided evenly between assigning physical and psychological reasons for this.

Summary. Project children remaining in foster care differed from those in the project who got a permanent plan in that they were older and, at the time a permanent placement was actively sought by project workers, were rated less placeable than those who achieved a permanent plan. Clearly, project workers saw some as placeable, for 24 percent were free for adoption.

Even though a permanent plan as defined by the law was not achieved for these foster care children, 72 percent of the placements were seen by foster parents as permanent. Family and child adjustment improved since placement, and the family was satisfied with the way things were going.

Most Group 3 foster care families and children in the study seemed satisfied with the arrangement. Over half of the children in this group were seen by parents as permanent family members, and 62 percent had lived in their present homes longer than 36 months, though length of stay appeared to have had little relationship to sense of permanence.

Generally we have not found foster care to be characterized by unstable placements affording children limited chance for satisfactory adjustment and growth. In fact, children in foster care appeared to be doing as well as or better than children who had returned to their parents.

Most foster parents believed that they were providing permanent homes for their foster children even though legal sanctions did not exist. The reality of a foster parent's perception of his home as a permanent one can be questioned. If the future rate of movement of children in foster care is similar to that of the past, shown in Table 2, approximately one-third of these children can expect to change homes soon. So real permanence may not agree with perceived permanence. Children in foster homes seemed to be getting along well despite that lack of legal security. However, the implications of sudden dissolution of a seemingly secure situation, as is always possible in foster care, could be detrimental.

CONCLUSIONS

Those committed to the value of a permanent home for children in foster care can find reason for optimism from the results of this study. Permanent placements, once made, tended to be stable and disruptions occurring during efforts to find a permanent plan do not seem to have affected this stability. Scores on measures of well-being were high, indicating an overall family satisfaction within all placements. Some families had initial adjustment problems, but by the time of the interview most were getting along well. While returned-to-parent placements scored lower, most of these parents expressed optimism about the child's adjustment at the time of the interview.

The importance of perception of permanence in accounting for the child's well-being underscores the need to provide continuity to the child's life in a home that is likely to endure. While legal permanence as measured by type of placement was of less importance than the family's perception of permanence, there is an adverse effect on the child from disruption experienced at each move. Children in this study did not do as well when they first entered the home as at the time of the interview. Given the disadvantage of repeatedly having to adjust to a new home and the importance of the belief in the permanence of a placement to its success, it appears that efforts should be made to legitimize the perception of permanence by providing a home that both is seen as permanent and carries with it legal sanctions.

Child's Initial Status was the other most important indicator of the child's well being at the time of the interview. The past was a good predictor of the present. Children who got along well when they first entered the home were more likely to score high on well-being measures at the time of the interview.

Through a concentrated effort on each case, project caseworkers succeeded in placing more children in homes with prospects for permanence. Though all children chosen for the project were initially seen as unlikely to return home, 26% were returned to biological parents. Thus the caseworkers' initiative in pursuing this preferred placement achieved results.

The study findings point to the importance of the parent having a comfortable knowledge of the child's past However, neither ratings of the placeability of the child, the number of foster care placements nor the length of time in foster care, which were measures of the child's past experiences, accounted for significant portions of the variation in how the child was getting along at the time of the interview. Thus it appears that the past experiences of a child are less important to his present well being than an adequate knowledge of that past, whether good or poor.

Children in foster care were getting along surprisingly well. No differences were found between this group and the adopted children on

measures of adjustment at the time of the interview. However, no matter how well a child is doing in foster care, there is always the real possibility that he could change homes at any time. When a child changes placements, he must go through the adjustment process over again. In a permanent home the child will not need to make sudden transitions. Thus, the finding that children in foster care were not faring poorly does not obviate the need for permanent planning to eliminate the possibility of foster care drift.

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